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FIFTEEN EAST TIMORESE STUDENTS LIKELY TO BE TRIED IN JAKARTA

According to information received today from a reliable source in Jakarta, fifteen of the 22 East Timorese students who have been held in the Jakarta metropolitan police station (Polda Metro Jaya) for two months have been transferred to Salemba Prison, Jakarta. Their cases have been handed over by the police to the public prosecutor's office. This means that they are likely to be charged and tried.

The other seven are still under police custody and may soon be released. The procedural code requires the police to hand over detainees to the public prosecutor in order to be charged at the latest 60 days after their arrest. The 60-day period expired on 18 January for 21 of the 22 students, namely those who were arrested on 19 November, while demonstrating on the streets of Jakarta in favour of self-determination and in protest against the Dili massacre a week earlier.

The 22nd student in detention in Jakarta is Fernando de Araujo, an East Timorese student studying in Bali, arrested on 24 November, who was transferred from Bali to Jakarta just before Christmas. The names of the 15 who have been moved to Salemba are not yet known.

For some weeks, the detained students in Jakarta have been under intense pressure from the authorities to sign statements of allegiance, supporting integration and apologising for their actions. They were told that if they signed, they would probably not be charged or would be charged for lesser crimes.

Against this background, we assume that the seven still in police custody opted to sign so as to avoid remaining in prison, undergoing unfair trials and serving long sentences. If they are released, these will be conditional releases and the students will remain under close surveillance. It is a contemptible practice and should be strongly denounced.

TAPOL calls for the unconditional and immediate release of all the East Timorese students still in detention in Jakarta.